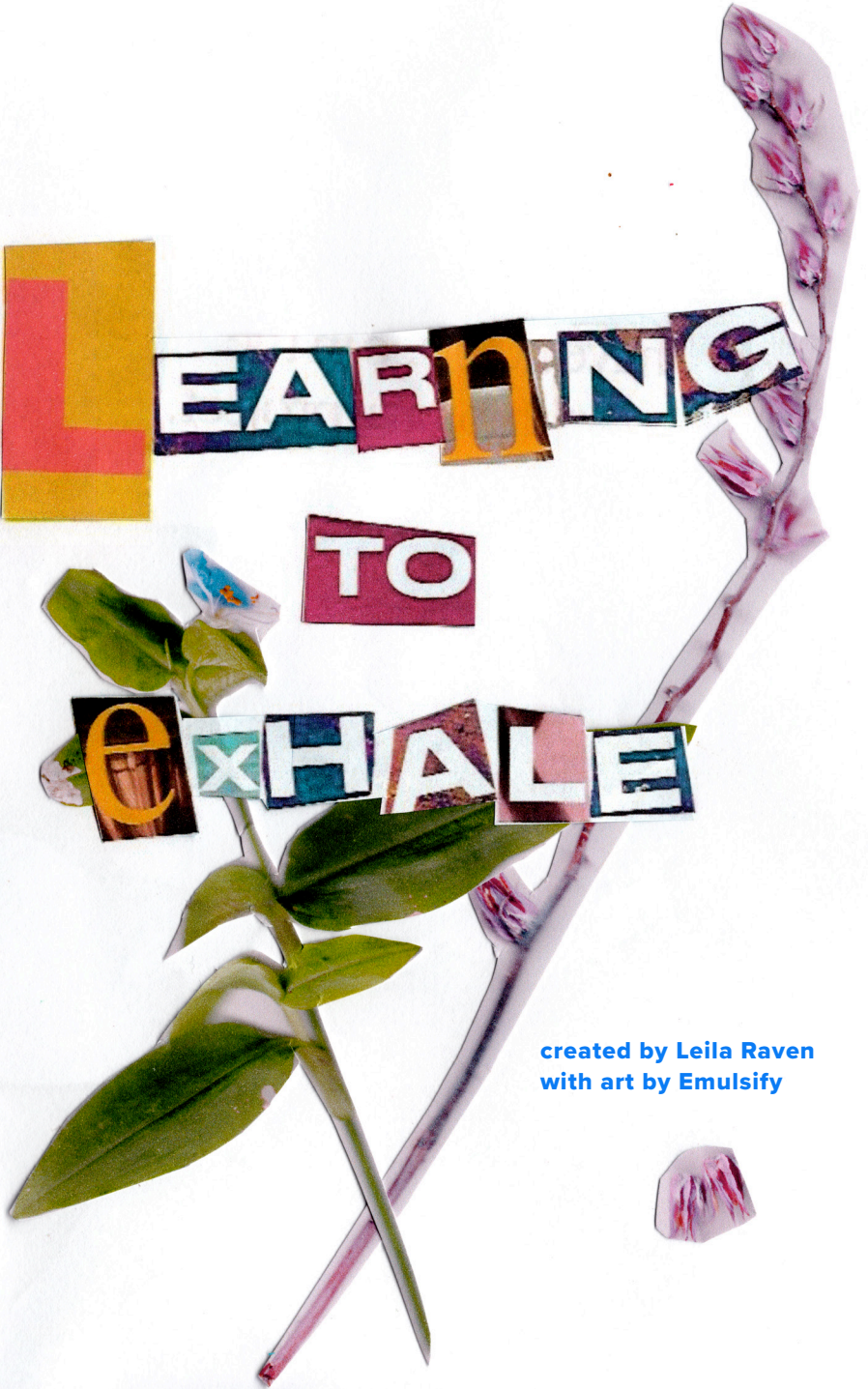


LEARNING

TO

EXHALE



created by Leila Raven  
with art by Emulsify



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# INTRODUCTION

In many ways, intimate partner abuse mirrors the patterns of colonization. Like colonizers, abusers exploit, extract from, and brutalize their victims, leaving us to become shells of ourselves, before creating a narrative to justify their oppressive behavior. Those victim blaming narratives get repeated and internalized by whole communities while those who were subjected to abuse get erased and discredited, until somehow the victims are made out to be the villains in a story about the violence we experienced.

Telling our stories becomes an act of resistance.

While many of us have been drawn to the idea of ending abuse through education and reconciliation, what I've learned, once again, through my most recent experience of abuse is that we won't end oppression through patient dialogue with our oppressors. Abuse is, by definition, taking advantage of a power imbalance to control or exploit someone. Sometimes those power imbalances are invisible. Often, the power imbalance is based on celebrity: a status that positions some people, and some organizations, above accountability—too important to our movements to be accountable. As many of us in radical organizing spaces know well, concentrating power in a single person in this way is a recipe for disaster. Organizers build the capacity of people around them to carry the work forward. No single person should ever be too important to the work to be accountable for their behavior toward others, and it is a red flag when someone is gate-keeping relationships and hoarding public speaking opportunities.

**We need anticarceral responses to patriarchal violence that**

**interrupt the power imbalance in an abusive relationship. Through organizing and collective action, we can shift power.**

This zine documents my experience organizing to respond to rape, abuse, and the enabling of an abuser by the Commune Magazine collective from October 2019 through May 2020. After several direct confrontations appealing to my abuser's humanity, and after multiple assaults, I turned to my community and mobilized a social media campaign using the hashtag #NoPlatformForRapists in December 2019. Through this campaign, I successfully deplatformed my abuser and learned many stories of his previous abuses as well as abuses by those who protected him within the Commune collective. Believing that people can change, and that people are not defined by their past behaviors, I proceeded to participate in what I believed to be an accountability process with the Commune Magazine collective until March 2020. In the process, I asked that my abuser read two books and answer four questions: *What happened? What were you thinking at the time? What have you thought about since? How will we make sure this doesn't happen again?* I asked the accountability team, made up of two Commune editors up until one removed themselves from the process in late February, to reflect on their role: How can a whole community take responsibility for interrupting, addressing, and working to prevent abuse? In the following pages, I offer thoughts and experiences to encourage us all to reflect on our role in building safer organizing spaces.

As I put this record of my experience into the world, with contributions from my friends and comrades in the struggle against patriarchal violence, Je'Kendria Trahan, Hyejin Shim, and Nathalia Gibbs, and with art by Emulsify, I continue to work toward healing and safety through storytelling and kaleidoscopic justice, a version of justice that is ever-evolving and, for me, involves supporting survivors navigating similar experiences of abuse, and abusive accountability processes,

in radical leftist spaces. I am offering this zine as a resource for survivors seeking to reject carceral systems and find safety and healing from abuse in organizing spaces. This offering seeks to build upon the current body of work around transformative justice, honoring many current TJ practitioners for their thought leadership around this issue, while recognizing that the primary publisher of books about transformative justice has repeatedly been called out for working with abusers and their enablers. Currently, AK Press continues to partner on the poetry press Commune Editions, which has significant overlap with the editorial collective and Board of the now-defunct Commune Magazine. After being called out most recently this past summer for working with another abuser, AK Press quickly sought to publish an essay on “cancel culture” that has been criticized for the way it is already being weaponized against survivors in organizing spaces.

## **Survivors deserve more options.**

Critiques of accountability processes have been documented before. I encourage folks to look to the zines *Betrayal: A Critical Analysis of Rape Culture in Anarchist Subcultures* and *What About the Rapists? Anarchist Responses to Crime and Justice*. *Learning to Exhale* documents my process of organizing my community to collectively respond and build safety from abuse. It features contributions from queer survivors who are Black and people of color who have supported me in various ways through my process.

I have enormous gratitude to the community that has supported me through my healing journey.



**R**APIST**T**S

have no place in the  
revolutionary project.

**WHERE ARE YOU, REVOLUTION?**





# NAMING THE HARM IS NOT HARM

BY HYEJIN SHIM

It is frustrating to see that people really seem to think it's survivors who are least invested, patient, or hopeful in their abusers' change. Do they not get that hope & love are often major parts of why people stay? That seeing the best in your abuser is a survival strategy? And that they, more than anyone else, usually know the ins and outs of their abusers' trauma, vulnerability, lovability? And that they have likely wrestled with their humanity the most? That they have often poured in more love and effort than the friends peers & fans around them?

There is such little curiosity about how survivors feel and why, and simultaneously so many deeply patronizing assumptions. There is so much encouragement, implicit and explicit, towards survivors in our (TJ) spheres to keep loving & taking care of their abusers, to keep waiting for that potential to show up. Tell me this isn't a repetition or even an extension of many survivors' inner voices convincing themselves to give their abusers just one more chance. It troubles me that survivors are expected to and/or praised for trying every last option in the book while they bleed themselves dry—before doing something more 'drastic' becomes justifiable. Many years of work in supporting survivors of domestic and sexual violence have taught me that making survivors jump through hoops to prove the legitimacy of their every single action is very much policing, and I believe that we have

our own alternative-yet-parallel methods of seeking “perfect victims” and discarding the ones whose needs, stories, and survival acts make us too uncomfortable, call our own complicity into question. More and more, I believe that some acts seen as retaliation from survivors is better framed as self defense; community defense.

Unlinking your sense of personhood & responsibility from the feelings & acts of your abusive partner is actually a huge part of healing from abuse.

As is freeing yourself from being responsible for their anger, their blame, their self hate & misery.

As is living as yourself, for yourself.

It is okay to walk away. It is okay to give up on something that hurts and violates you. It is okay to refuse continued enmeshment. Resetting the extreme power imbalance that intimate violence creates takes a long time, even/especially within yourself.

It really makes my heart hurt that so many survivors who’ve gone through literal hell to say, enough, I’m done, this can’t go on, are saddled with the demand again to walk on eggshells for their abusers, to have to be so watchful and scared all over again. How is this transformative? Half the struggle of recovering from abuse is in identifying what happened as abuse, manipulation, grooming, things minimized as nothing in the relationship. But even naming the acts is too dehumanizing (for who?) so it all has to be collapsed to become... harm? I have had to fight my whole life to be able to call things what they were & are. I am still learning how to allow my experiences to have their weight in words. Language matters; specificity allows us to have conversations about the things we were not supposed to name. Though I understand the overall argument for why everything is becoming reduced to “harm”, this move towards neutralizing the words rape, abuse, assault, and more feels disorienting as well as silencing.

Every community has its versions of victim blaming and silencing. Keep it in the family, pray to God about it, think of the children. Activist communities imagine they are above this, when in fact cultish

in-group/out-group dynamics & rhetoric abound. It is all in plain sight. Those who use sexual/domestic violence in organizing are not as “charismatic” as they are hyped up to be. Let’s stop mythologizing the supposed charm and brilliance of abusive people, and instead attend to the petty and obvious red flags. Abuse of power follows patterns. But we are socialized into ignoring and minimizing every dead giveaway. Particularly when the cues have to do with misogyny.

It’s been a lot to constantly be processing abuse and sexual violence in “movement” spaces. The cumulative feelings of mistrust and betrayal are hard to shake, and the rage grows seeing how much we are expected to take a passive, muted role in addressing this type of violence. For instructions on “changing conditions” we are given platitudes and more platitudes about how we can better bear the “contradictions” of being abused. The activist equivalent of “just pray about it”. And the victim blaming is both subtle and unending. People valorize survivors like Marissa Alexander for fighting back, firing that warning shot to save themselves. Yet the everyday acts of self defense and community defense survivors take to name abuse & uproot it are dissected, nitpicked, found unjustifiable, found insufficient.

We do this for literally no other type of power struggle as organizers or activists: appeal to the potential and unproven values of the people stealing, diminishing, or exploiting others’ power & agency. Wait around & hope they change. We could die waiting. We do die waiting.

*[Originally posted on Twitter as a thread; edited for flow. Thank you Leila for giving these thoughts a better place to live and breathe, here among your own words and stories. I still worry that they are disjointed and insufficient, harsh or confusing, but in this year of loss and rage I am finding myself more willing to accept the duality of my feelings: of being desperate to say and do more, while simultaneously wanting to never speak or do again, emptying myself of both grief and love. The impossibility of capturing it all. And my words, they just don’t come with the ease or confidence they used to.]*

# A DIVERSITY OF TACTICS AND WHO GETS TO USE THEM

BY NATHALIA GIBBS

When we critique call outs as using the master's tools, when we say that there are 'just some abusers falling through the cracks of accountability' we are ignoring the reality of the time we are living in. People aren't falling through the cracks of accountability, they are expertly evading it. **When we tell survivors that the master's tools must feel good in their hands, we make ourselves arbiters of right and wrong, and we delegitimize what are in fact, tools of the oppressed.**

We aren't usually taught how to survive. We aren't taught how to erect barriers towards abuse. This is deliberate. We live under oppressive and abusive systems that enact this same kind of violence on us, on a larger scale. We find ways to develop our own tools and cobble together lessons from those who came before us. We build up trust in ourselves. We come together to create and imagine safety. As Leila Raven says, "Why do we honor a diversity of tactics in every other situation, but not for survivors?" Growing up I was taught that survival was endurance, but that wasn't what I wanted when I came forward. I wanted healing, but it was on me to find out how to get there. It was on me to find out ways to be heard. It was on me to

figure out how to leave disguised processes that were made to harm me.

When I finally got to the place where I could speak, I picked the tactic that would interrupt the most violence. I came to the public because my community didn't listen. I knew what I had experienced, I didn't need investigations. What I needed was space and grace to say, I'm hurting, still, and I don't know what comes next. But I do know this can't keep happening. I do know that I can interrupt this cycle.

We bend over backward to give grace to those who do harm. And to be honest, they deserve that grace. **But survivors deserve that grace too.** The questions for those who have harmed are often, "What are the root causes of this behavior", "Where is their trauma", and "Where are the systemic failures that led to this". We center their experiences. We make leaps and bounds to connect the dots of their lives for them. We empathize, We study. We try to teach. We try to hold them. We protect them from the state. We protect them from the full weight of internalized guilt and shame.

But where are the questions for survivors? Who asks how much pain they might have been in? Who records the far-reaching effects of their harm? How many people refused to believe them before this? How many people saw something, but never reached out? How many people knew? How many people silenced them? How many people decentered them? Where have we as a community, failed to keep them safe? What are the systemic structures that made this inevitable? Where is the protection and empathy for survivors?

Reciprocity is a foundational part of building communities resisting oppression. We know that extraction oriented cultures don't serve us, or the world we live in. As we demand survivors to give grace, to be patient, and bear the weight of shifting these structures, what are we giving back to them? Continued policing? The responsibility of legitimizing their harm in the face of the world? Acceptance that is conditional on perfection?

"Survivors should know better than to use that language"

“Survivors shouldn’t do call-outs, they’re performative”

“Survivors shouldn’t ask for people to be canceled / fired / disposed of”

When people finally find the language to critique and articulate how they are oppressed, and take to the streets in opposition, do we call those the master’s tools? Why is it any different for survivors? Power and abuse are inextricable—that’s why we can even use a phrase like ‘master’s tools’. We know there is a master, an oppressor, a more powerful individual. Why aren’t we committing to finding ways to keep survivors safe? Why aren’t we seeing call outs as an effort from survivors to keep others safe? Why aren’t we seeing these call-outs as a chance to be curious about what ideologies we hold, that let abuse take root in our spaces? Why aren’t we approaching these call outs as an opportunity to develop structures to keep people safe? Why do we see protecting people from consequences as safety, but stopping harm isn’t? Whose safety really matters to us, and who are we willing to leave behind? What does it mean when we use our large platforms to focus on shifting shame onto survivors, instead of eliminating it altogether? This isn’t an either-or.

I am not above learning. In fact, that is why I engaged in a public call-out. I want more than anything to find a way to transform this harm. I don’t want anyone else to come to me and say, me too. I don’t want to hear their story and realize more depths of my own abuse, by the same hands. When people say call-outs mimic the carceral state, I want to make very clear that there are ACTUAL carceral responses that could have been taken, that weren’t. Do we not see the carcerality in a moralistic call determining what the ‘good call-outs’ are? We know that forcing a binary serves no one, but here we are asking questions like “How can we believe survivors and be abolitionists?” when the real question should be, **how can we not believe survivors and call ourselves abolitionists?**

How could you shame someone for trying to survive? How could you shame them for succeeding? We know that gendered violence

is political and power-based. We know that trauma is disabling and so we cannot make healing or transformation inaccessible. All of this space is reserved for transforming those who do harm and to transform the systems behind them. But when will we think about the growth, healing, and transformation for survivors?



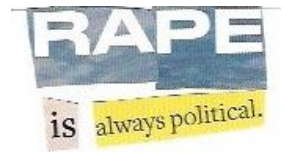
Exposing these crimes can be extremely dangerous:

**50%** of women's murders are by a current or former intimate partner.

Rates are higher for women who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

Up to **75%** of women who are killed are murdered after they leave their partners.





In solidarity with survivors of gendered violence, **we are calling for accountability from Commune Magazine**, which is affiliated with a person who raped a New York City organizer this year. We have sent a more specific email to the magazine's editors calling for this person to resign, or be removed, from their role and to be supported by community in changing harmful and oppressive behaviors.

When an individual enacts violence against a marginalized person, they are carrying out the work of the state to uphold systems of oppression. **If we seek to dismantle the capitalist system, we must simultaneously work to dismantle sexism, racism, and all forms of structural violence.** Most pressing, we must work to dismantle oppressive behaviors within our communities, within our movements, and within ourselves.

As prison and police abolitionists, we reject carceral approaches that increase violence against marginalized communities. As practitioners of transformative justice, we reject punishment as a strategy for building safety. We also acknowledge that **actions have consequences**, and that a leftist and anticapitalist publication should not provide a platform to someone who has a demonstrated pattern of sexual violence. This person has had multiple opportunities to take accountability for their actions, and instead has continued to violate boundaries and use manipulation and gaslighting tactics to continue to cause harm. Gendered violence is not an individual problem; it is a community problem that requires community-based solutions. This includes supporting survivors and taking collective responsibility to respond to harm when it occurs.

We release this statement to keep confidential the identity of the survivor, and the person who caused harm, while **demanding that the person who caused harm be removed from their role within Commune Magazine.** We ask that, if the identities of the people involved become revealed over the course of this process, people who seek to stand with the survivor avoid engaging in harassment or punitive behaviors toward the person who caused harm. This is a survivor-centered process with a goal of increasing community safety, de-platforming an abuser, and moving a survivor closer to healing.

**We expect clear action steps, including the removal of the person who caused sexual harm from their role in Commune Magazine, by the end of December 2019.**

**RAPISTS**  
**MUST RESIGN.**

**#NOPLATFORMFORRAPISTS**

it was an act  
of violence.



Pinko @pinkomagazine · Dec 15, 2019

We support survivors and their demand for removing rapists from Commune magazine. There must be no space for sexual violence in the left.



subtletitty @julie\_\_xu · Dec 14, 2019

**Accountability** means holding people responsible for their actions especially when it harms members of our community. Solidarity with all survivors. We are demanding action from @commune\_mag to refuse platforms for rapists.



Jessica Peñaranda @RadicalBfly1 · Dec 14, 2019

When our movements for liberation replicate the oppressive systems & behaviors we seek to dismantle, we must call for accountability. We're calling on @commune\_mag to provide #NoPlatformForRapists.



Collective Action for Safe Spaces

@SafeSpacesDC

We believe & support survivors, period. When harm happens in our community, we must actively center accountability, repair, and healing in ways that don't replicate state violence. We stand in solidarity in calling on @commune\_mag to take action #noplatformforrapists



Red Menace

@redschulte

Leftists who don't support survivors and seek accountability within their own communities are on the wrong fucking side of history. No publication is more important than survivors' safety! [bit.ly/NoPlatformForR](https://bit.ly/NoPlatformForR) #NoPlatformForRapists



Justice For Muslims Collective

@domuslimjustice

When our movements for liberation replicate the oppressive systems & behaviors we seek to dismantle, we must call for accountability. We're calling on @commune\_mag to provide #NoPlatformForRapists. #ripitupandstartover

Repatriation is  
central to undoing  
the damage  
of the past.



michela @saymthreetimes · Dec 14, 2019

When our movements for liberation replicate the oppressive systems & behaviors we seek to dismantle, we must call for accountability. We're calling on @commune\_mag to provide #NoPlatformForRapists. #ripitupandstartover Statement: [bit.ly/NoPlatformForR](https://bit.ly/NoPlatformForR)...

Defeat is not inevitable.

We make our community by defending it.



DECRI NOW DC  
@DecrimNowDC

In our pursuit for a new world, we must practice accountability and safety in our communities.

We demand that [@commune\\_mag](#) refuse to provide platforms for rapists. [#NoPlatformForRapists](#)



Decrim NY  
@DecrimNY

When our movements for liberation replicate the oppressive systems & behaviors we seek to dismantle, we must call for accountability. We're calling on [@commune\\_mag](#) to provide [#NoPlatformForRapists](#). [#ripitupandstartover](#)

[#NOPLATFORMFORRAPISTS](#)



hyejin  
@hyejinhere

solidarity with survivors always. sexual violence is an urgent and destructive political issue that must be faced head on. [@commune\\_mag](#), [#NoPlatformForRapists](#).



noor mir  
@thedronalisa

[@commune\\_mag](#) Do the right thing [#NoPlatformForRapists](#)



لیلی  
@theleilraven

solidarity with survivors forever. our movement spaces should provide [#NoPlatformForRapists](#). [@commune\\_mag](#), your move.



alicia sanchez gill,  
@aliciasanchez

In solidarity with survivors of gendered violence, we are calling for accountability from [@commune\\_mag](#). We want the person who caused harm to be removed from their role within Commune Magazine. Trust survivors.  
[#NoPlatformForRapists](#)




Support Ho(s)e  
@supporthosechi

If your "radical platform" doesn't call for accountability, turns out it's not fucking radical. Here's hoping the editors of [@commune\\_mag](#) call their folk in and support survivors. [bit.ly/NoPlatformForR...](#) [#NoPlatformForRapists](#)

**DRaja**  
@DarakshanRaja

When our movements for liberation replicate the oppressive systems & behaviors we seek to dismantle, we must call for accountability. We're calling on @commune\_mag to provide #NoPlatformForRapists. #ripitupandstartover

Share the statement: [bit.ly/NoPlatformForR...](https://bit.ly/NoPlatformForR...)

 **bernie make lucy dacus poet laureate**  
@communoah

To fight capitalism, we must fight the interpersonal violence that upholds gender oppression --- \*especially\* when it shows up in our own communities.

In solidarity with survivors, we're demanding accountability from @Commune\_Mag.  
#NoPlatformForRapists



**Sophie Ellman-Golan** @EgSophie · Dec 14, 2019

When our movements for liberation replicate the oppressive systems & behaviors we seek to dismantle, we must call for accountability. We're calling on @commune\_mag to provide #NoPlatformForRapists.

 **Kate**  
@KateDAdamo

If our movements are committed to liberation, we cannot replicate the oppressive systems & behaviors we seek to dismantle. We're calling for accountability. We're calling on @commune\_mag to provide #NoPlatformForRapists.

#NOPLATFORMFORRAPISTS

 **Fierce Invalids**  
@fierec\_invalids

The Revolution Starts at Home: That's why, in solidarity with survivors, we're demanding accountability from @commune\_mag to provide #NoPlatformForRapists.

Our revolutionary politics must embrace the many broken and miserable places inside ourselves.

 **Mia Birdsong**  
@miabirdsong

#NoPlatformForRapists

**¿DÓNDE ESTÁS,  
REVOLUCIÓN?**

**COMMUNITIES**

**MUST STRUGGLE**

against

**OPPRESSION**

to

**TRANSFORM**

**HARM**

and **MAKE A  
NEW WORLD**

**WITHOUT  
INCARCERATION**

# Commune

12/26/19

On Saturday December 14, the editorial collective at *Commune* received a private statement describing an experience of sexual violence with a person who has been involved in our project. The statement demanded that the person named resign or be removed from *Commune*, and invited them to enter into an accountability process once that step had been taken. A public and anonymized version of the statement was also released.

As a collective we responded to this statement with the urgency it warranted, first pausing all magazine operations to address the matter and immediately reaching clear consensus that we would meet the statement's demands. We appreciate the opportunity that the survivor's community has given us to act with integrity and care. The private statement was remarkable both in its clarity and its emphasis on an ethical and survivor-oriented process.

We have solidarity with survivors. And we take seriously the survivor's request not to name any of the individuals involved, including the person who committed harm. We acknowledge that maintaining anonymity may raise concerns, but it is not our place to question the process delineated by the survivor's community. We invite readers with further concerns or questions to email us at [administrationofthings@communemag.com](mailto:administrationofthings@communemag.com).

We began our publication in clear agreement that it would not be a platform for rapists but our project is not immune to the presence of perpetrators. We know that it matters greatly what we do next. Many of us have watched projects like ours crumble under the fantasy that a left can somehow construct itself outside the capitalist social totality and its sexual violence. Many of us have been deeply harmed by attempts to silence, downplay, or wish away this systemic problem when it arises in political projects and spaces. And some of us are survivors, who understand keenly that to survive is to insist, each and every day, that another world is possible.

Our responsibility in this moment is to meet the demands sent to us — and to go beyond them. We are committed not only to addressing the issue that has been brought before us, but to thinking into the future about our own project and our broader political communities. The person who committed harm has willingly stepped down to engage fully in an accountability process. The editorial collective has since met multiple times, and in the coming months will reflect on next steps as we resume operations.

There is no revolution without the struggle against sexual violence. The struggle must continue.

COMMUNEMAG.COM

[administrationofthings@communemag.com](mailto:administrationofthings@communemag.com)

The problem with the

USE

OF

LANGUAGE

OF

*Revolution*

WITHOUT  
PRAXIS

is that it promises to change everything  
while keeping everything the same.

contributing

to more destructive  
patterns.

# **AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PERSON WHO RAPED ME:**

You asked me many times: *“Why me? Why do you keep coming back?”* I told you that I was listening to my body, and my body was hooked. I didn’t know then, but I know now, that when post-traumatic stress disorder is activated, it feels a lot like being turned on. When the body is convinced that danger is present, it won’t stop searching until it locates the source of the threat. Subconsciously, we repeat the events of the past in an attempt to rewrite the scripts of our lives, to master our trauma, to create a new ending.

## **For most of my life, I’ve been trapped in an old script.**

I grew up in a household where I was severely abused. I’ve been hit, kicked, thrown out of a window, pushed out of a moving car. I’ve been handcuffed to a bed, drugged, beaten, and left there to die. When I was 13, I was abruptly removed from home by the foster system. I wavered back and forth over the years between finally feeling free and longing to go home. When I was sexually abused in the system, I ran away. At 15, I was on my own and using sex to survive.

After college, I reconstructed these dynamics in my relationship with a long term partner. He went out of his way to give me everything I



wanted. He also abused me. 8 years ago, I was arrested and jailed for stabbing him in self defense. The state would never see me as a victim. For trans and queer people of color, our survival is a crime. When it was all over, I packed away my feelings and put them in a box, filed alongside many more boxes of feelings that I didn't know what to do with, feelings that I thought I'd be better off without.

## **At the same time, I became a parent.**

And I learned to love, and to nurture, and to be vulnerable, and to be patient. I learned to be an excellent caregiver, for everyone but myself. I denied my own feelings and my own needs, and I focused on the needs, safety, and wellbeing of everyone else. I was afraid that, if I acknowledged that I did have feelings and needs of my own, I'd be forced to confront the ways that I'd been hurt and the ways that my needs had been unmet. I was afraid that, if I opened those boxes, I'd be paralyzed by what I'd find inside.

You asked me many times: *“What’s your type? What are you looking for?”* I didn't know then, but I know now: I am drawn to the people and the places that make me feel needed. The ones that help me hide my boxes. I came back to New York because I felt called here. I felt needed at home to use the skills that I learned over the 12 years that I was gone. What I thought that meant was taking on a similar role in a similar organization and nurturing it back to life. I thought it meant honoring my younger brother's life by repairing blood ties. When all of that blew up in my face, I was forced to confront the reality that I had really been called home to face myself, to nurture myself back to life.

Fast forward to you. I saw the red flags early on. The condescending comments, the smirking, the criticism, the intimidation, the constant accusations and interrogations, the way you towered over me in your hallway, descriptions of kink that sounded more like threats, the ways

you got me to apologize for things that you'd done, the ways you exploited me, assaulted me, and then turned it around and blamed me. I saw the red flags, and I walked toward them. At best, I believed that I could be an antidote to violence. At worst, the violence made me feel at home.

You weaponized our intimacy. And in doing so, you forgot that I had the power to do the same. I chose not to use that power as a weapon. When I did share the intimate details of our relationship, I did so not to cause harm but to heal. To break the cycle, to write a new script.

You tried to hurt me many times. But you didn't know how to hurt me. You relied on patriarchal gender norms and heterosexual conventions that I don't subscribe to. You didn't know that nothing hurts me more than a lack of alignment between the values and the actions of a self-described "revolutionary." This hurts me at my core, because it leaves me to question: **What will this mean for the new world our movements are meant to create?**

After you raped me, I was challenged to respond with actions aligned with my values.

## **For those of us who want to build a world without prisons or police, we have had to grapple with the question: What about the rapists?**

Do we engage in vigilante justice and confront them with baseball bats? Do we invite them to participate in community-based processes that encourage them to take accountability? Or, in the era of social media, do we publicly name them and allow for mob justice by a thousand Twitter users? What about a little bit of all of the above?

There is no wrong way to respond to oppressive violence. Whatever strategies we've used in the past were the best we had. I have pretended to be asleep. I've grabbed a knife. I have called the cops. I have tried to use love as an antidote. And I've survived to tell my stories, and to ask myself: **What strategies undermine the state, and what strategies enable it?** How do we avoid replicating carceral systems without minimizing or dismissing the reality and the impact of interpersonal violence? How do we hold our movement spaces to a higher standard?

We all cause harm, and we all experience harm, I often say. We have to remember the humanity of people who cause harm. *We have to separate the person you are from the things you do.* But what do we do when we're faced with a pattern of abusive behavior? What if the person who caused harm expresses no remorse and seems to revel in the harm they've caused?

## What do we do with the abusers?

I wanted you to apologize. I wanted you to own and repair the harm you caused. I wanted to understand *why*. I asked you to read three short essays and answer four questions:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- How will we make sure this doesn't happen again?

You said you were sorry. You said you'd read the essays. You said you'd answer the questions. And then, you raped me again.

But *why*? I felt like I needed answers. I needed to understand: What motivates abusive and oppressive behavior? Why do people cause harm? *Why did you want to hurt me?*

I read and re-read every book, every zine, and every article, searching for an answer. I created a folder where I uploaded screenshots of our messages, organized them by medium, and labeled each file with the date and the abusive behavior. I pored over these messages, working to identify a pattern, to solve it like a math problem, to analyze it like a case study, to cure it like a disease.

Now, I realize that, while my questions may have been what you needed to interrogate your own behavior, they'd never give me the answers that I needed.

None of us are immune to the ways that systems of oppression manifest in our everyday lives. We all breathe in air polluted by rape culture, white supremacy, cis heteropatriarchy, ableism, ageism, and capitalism. If we don't consciously, and constantly, struggle against the messages of the dominant culture, we are bound to internalize oppression. People engage in abusive, oppressive behaviors because it benefits them in the short term to align with systems of power. The consequences fall not on the oppressor, but on the oppressed.

**The question isn't: why do people abuse & oppress others? The question is: Why **don't** we?**

**What can we learn about making a revolution from the practice of rejecting oppressive behaviors in our everyday lives? How do we wake up every day, breathe in air polluted by rape culture and interlocking systems of oppression, and exhale in a way that heals?**



In an unpublished essay, you argued that there are lulls between mass uprisings, and that organizers like me fill these lulls with organizing activities that make no impact and burn us out. I told you that you wrote from a position of privilege. There are no lulls for some of us. Many of us organize because we are directly impacted. We are dragged into these fights. We are faced with the urgent need to change the conditions of our everyday lives. Not all of us have the luxury of an armchair on which to theorize about what it might take to make a revolution.

**Many of us, especially those who are Black and brown, trans and queer, sex working, disabled, and housing insecure, are making a revolution, here and now.**

I told you that, in my experience, the greatest sources of burnout are interpersonal conflict, interpersonal violence, and the choice of self-described revolutionaries to align with power to secure short term, short sighted wins. In doing so, our own comrades throw those of us who are more marginalized under the bus and sabotage our collective struggle for liberation.

*And isn't that what happened here?* You abused, assaulted, manipulated, and exploited me. You were never going to answer my questions. You were never going to make it right. And I could wait forever for you to stop causing harm, show remorse, and take accountability, or I could create a new context to make it clear that radical change was the only path forward.

**Like Assata Shakur said, “Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them.”**

Rape is a political act backed by a history of colonization and oppression. Rape is an act of war. *You dragged me into this fight.* I reclaimed my power through collective action. By organizing my community, I shifted the power imbalance between us. I shifted the burden of dealing with the consequences of your actions off of me and back to where that burden belonged: *with you.*

We all cause harm, and yet we don't all engage in a repetitive pattern of seeking power and control over our intimate partners. You turned our dynamic into a game of chess, each move carefully calculated to keep you in control. You tried to turn me into a pawn, but chess is a two-player game. Each of us involved our communities to play a role. You gathered your community to protect and enable your abuse. You hid your oppressive behavior behind a leadership role in a leftist publication. I gathered my community, too. You abused me, and I countered violence with nurturance. You isolated me, and I countered isolation with public action. You lied about what you did, and I countered dishonesty with transparency. You internalized oppression and aligned with the state to uphold patriarchal domination. I am embodying revolution, moving toward liberation, and leaving no one behind.

## **Consider yourself in check.**

Some questioned my decision to withhold your name. Communities should know if there's a rapist, they said. *But there's always a rapist.* Maybe it's a roommate, a friend, a partner, a comrade. Making a list of every person who has harmed, or might harm, won't make us safer. We'd all be on it.

In a conscious effort to avoid replicating carceral systems like sex offender registries, I have focused not on *who you are*, but *what you did*. It's behavior, not identity, that gives us the information we need to respond. The day after you raped me, you were crossing the bound-

aries of someone else who repeatedly rejected your advances. This happened in plain sight. No one intervened. What if it had happened differently? What if we all took collective responsibility for community safety?

When we take action to respond to oppressive behaviors, we create a context that demonstrates that violence won't be tolerated. We create a new world and a new way of living, loving, and being. We won't make a revolution by replacing old systems of domination with new systems of domination. **We'll make a revolution by turning this world inside out.**

**Like Angela Davis said, “You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world, and you have to do it all the time.”**

On the days that I feel hurt, I think to myself, “Why do I allow myself to be victimized in this way?” On the days that I feel rage, I think, “*I hunt men like you for sport.*” In both thoughts, I assign myself a level of power and responsibility that's more than human. Capitalist culture has instilled in me that I am responsible for everything that happens to me. When I blame myself and apologize for harm I didn't cause, it's because I've internalized capitalist oppression.

**I'm still learning, too, to breathe in polluted air and exhale in a way that heals.**

I am not responsible for what you did, or for what you do next. I cannot fix or change you, but I can work to change the world around you. I can wait forever for you to show signs of genuine accountability, or I can redirect my energy toward making resources available to those who have demonstrated the will to change.

A lesson I have learned through experiments in transformative justice is that the success of a community accountability process cannot depend on an abuser's willingness to be accountable, or even to stop causing harm. This is a setup for failure that gives abusers too much power. In the process I designed, you used many of the same abuse tactics to exert control: distortions, selfishness, manipulation, gaslighting, and then, when I said that I would walk away, a sudden transformation. You still did not take full responsibility, but just enough to tempt me to give you another chance, just enough to keep me in a process that had already extended far beyond the timeline that I had outlined. I'd seen these patterns before. You used the accountability process to further your abuse, uninterrupted by your community until it was too late; the damage had already been done. Perhaps this is the only way you know how to behave. Perhaps your accountability team didn't open the folder I shared because they didn't want to see, didn't want to know. And when the extent of your sexual violence and abuse became undeniably clear, perhaps it was easier for them to distance themselves in the end than to acknowledge the ways that they had participated.

**Removing one rapist from a community is the easy work; interrogating the ways that the community has promoted and enabled rape culture is the hard part.**

I will always have faith in your humanity and your capacity to transform, and the capacity of your community to be accountable. I also know that change takes time. For now, we can build accountable communities by ensuring that survivors are supported, abusers face consequences, and the conditions are created for safety, healing, justice, and accountability.

In these ways, my process of seeking community accountability



has been successful:

- I was believed, centered, and supported by my community;
- We de-platformed an abuser from a leftist publication;
- We made the abuser's community acutely aware of their wide range of abuse tactics;
- We called on the abuser's community to be accountable for enabling abuse, recognizing that gendered violence is not an individual problem but a community problem;
- We constrained the abuser's ability to cause harm by reporting them on sex/dating apps and increasing community awareness, without enabling online harassment;
- We ensured that the abuser had resources and support to start life-long work toward accountability and transformation.

**I challenge you to join me in making a revolution, here and now, where it matters: in our communities, in our movements, and in ourselves.**



# TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

Offers us a framework to  
respond to violence in  
our communities without  
enabling state violence.

Its central tenets:

No one is disposable.

**ABOLITION** of  
systems of oppression

and the

**SAFETY**

**OF**

**SURVIVORS**

# IN-THE-IN- BETWEENS

BY JE’KENDRIA TRAHAN

It takes a village  
But what makes the village?  
It doesn’t materialize out of thin air  
It’s in-the-in-between where connection is crystallized

It is cradled in between the hellos of a new morning  
Nestled in the whispered check-ins after a disagreement,  
Painted on bold canvasses of respected boundaries,  
Woven into the rigor of a perpetual practice of active listening  
Hymned in the chorus of “I believe you” and “How can I support  
you?”

It is the soothing salve of trusting each other with our deepest vulner-  
abilities  
Absorbed in the diligent study of loving each other better  
Echoed in the erotic sounds of round after round of radical consent  
Whisked into the gentle feedback about the potato salad at the pot-  
luck  
Thread through the unison of tear-soaked outcries outside the police  
station

It is the excavation of the parts of ourselves that emulate the state  
Etched into the robust safety plan known for easing mental health  
crises

Baked into the warm, filling meals delivered to the grieving friend  
Sprinkled into the repetitions of internal mantras that reject blame  
and shame

Conjured in the audacious wonder and creativity of a Black child with  
full autonomy

It is the gasps for air from gut-busting laughter over popcorn at movie  
night

Vibrated through interlocked fingers and perspiring palms in prayer  
during the vigil

Drizzled into the affirmations of decolonized expression and disman-  
tled binaries

Captured in the crowd of bystanders that paused to ensure the trans  
youth was safe

Stretched through the tattooed forearm passing the talking piece  
during a restorative circle

It is in-the-in-betweens of the budding friction of conflict amongst  
comrades

Simmered in the smouldering remnants after de-escalated explosions  
of harm

Splattered on murals with gold speckles of painted acrylic declaring  
“We Keep Us Safe”

Scribbled into the squeaks of dry erase markers drafting co-created  
community agreements

Amplified through earnest steps taken after admitted apologies and  
palpable remorse

It takes the village

Committing to coalescing into fractals of possibility

Digging into the soil to replant seeds of collective accountability  
Birthing constellations of care for our grandbabies' grandbabies to inherit.



SUPPORT  
PROTECT  
and



EMULSIFY 20

SURVIVORS  
ALWAYS IN ALL WAYS

# COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY MEANS WE ALL PLAY A ROLE

It has been a difficult week for many survivors, watching the ways that Tara Reade has been treated in the news and worse, knowing that it's exactly how survivors are treated in our communities. Survivors are silenced and dismissed, our experiences are minimized, and our safety and wellbeing is sacrificed so that the oppressive systems and structures that enabled the violence against us may remain in place.

Even in radical leftist spaces.

**When our movements for liberation replicate the oppressive systems that we seek to dismantle, we must call for accountability. And right now, accountability for Commune Magazine means shutting down and redistributing funds to Black-led anti-violence work.**

I have previously shared my story of navigating healing, safety, justice, and accountability in the aftermath of abuse and assault by a former Commune Magazine editor. In the following account, I will offer more specific details about the ongoing work toward transformative justice and community accountability in this situation. I am writing for those who are navigating similar situations in search of more strate-



gies, and for those seeking ways to support me.

I blocked the person who raped me on December 5th, when it became clear beyond a doubt that this person had no intention of accepting the opportunity that I offered for repair. The next day, I saw the notice that there would be a Commune Magazine party at Verso. *If he won't involve his community, I will*, I thought. I had 8 days.

I reached out to my community—friends who are mostly organizers, many of whom specifically have organized for gender justice, and I shared the bullet points: I was raped, confronted the person who raped me, raped again, and then harassed across multiple platforms. Most friends had already known about the assault on October 30th, or knew that something had happened. Some friends knew that I had already confronted the person who raped me by email. It took time for me to feel comfortable sharing about the other assaults; I struggled with guilt and shame, feeling like I had allowed myself to be assaulted again. Suddenly, many of the confusing behaviors that I had experienced and shared with friends over the past several months were becoming more transparent as abusive. I shared screenshots with some folks who helped me think through a strategy and craft a statement. We talked about the ways that abusers tend to become the central focus of online campaigns seeking accountability; we withheld his name for many reasons that I have explained before and also because we wanted a survivor-centered process. I wanted justice defined by my values.

Next, I started to reach out to my broader community—friends, comrades, and grassroots groups that I had organized with in recent years, and I asked that they share the statement on Twitter on December 14th at 6pm, the start time of the Commune launch party. We offered a sample tweet. We chose this time because we wanted to make sure that the person who raped me couldn't evade confrontation, and wouldn't have time to craft a good enough lie that would hold up over time. I offered to answer any questions that friends may have had, but no one asked; **my community believed me**, and

wanted to support me. This, more than anything, felt healing to me. I was not alone. In this process of reaching out to friends, I learned from others about members of this collective's history of gendered violence, anti-Blackness, racism, rape apologetics, and protecting rapists and abusers, stemming long before my experience

My team had planned to chalk outside the Verso party, but it rained, and so our action was only virtual, although Bluestockings volunteers were able to chalk earlier in the day and share the photos on social media later that night. We publicly shared our statement as a graphic and as a PDF for accessibility, and we created a private version to send directly to the editorial collective at Commune, which named the rapist and offered more information. However, the PDF version of our statement was slightly different from the graphic: we had debated back and forth over whether we should limit our ask to removing the rapist, or call on Commune to take further steps to address gendered violence. We debated: *We don't want to perpetuate the narrative that rapists are simply bad apples. We know that sexual violence does not occur in a vacuum. We know that gendered violence is not an individual problem, but a community problem. And then: What if we turn over a rock and uncover more terrible things?* In the end, we accidentally released both statements: The graphic called only for the removal of the rapist, and the PDF called for both his removal and a plan that the magazine would provide no platform for rapists.

More than 20 individuals and organizations shared the statement around the same time, and then others who were not directly connected to the organizing jumped in to share our statement and use our hashtag in solidarity: **#NoPlatformForRapists.**

On the night of December 15th, we heard back from another editor at Commune with a message from the whole collective: the person who raped me would step down, and "his comrades in the Commune community are committed to centering the survivor while also supporting FORMER EDITOR through this process, such that we can

collectively work towards true restorative justice.” In the same email, they said that they wrote as community members, not as editors of a magazine. Nonetheless, we knew we were talking to Commune collective members, just as I knew when I was raped that, while my rapist may not have been acting in his official capacity as a Commune collective member, this was a community to which he was accountable. We responded to this email with the steps we were seeking of the person who raped me to be able to participate in an accountability process.

Here is the email that we sent, with names redacted, which others are welcome to use as a template:

*Hi COMMUNE EDITOR ALSO ACCUSED OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT,*

*We are grateful for, and encouraged by, this prompt response.*

*We are wary of REMOVED EDITOR’s perception that he had shown a willingness to participate in an accountability process. The survivor outlined her expectations in a November 14th email, and REMOVED EDITOR has failed to fill any of the expectations, instead setting his own terms for an accountability conversation that did not involve community support. The survivor interpreted his response as another display of seeking power and control within the process itself. This was exacerbated by the rape on November 15th, after having initiated conversations around accountability for the October 30th incident. We communicate this because we recognize it is part of a pattern of manipulative behavior that we hope REMOVED EDITOR’s support team will be able to address.*

*Still, we feel confident that, with this new context and with community support to ensure a survivor-centered process, there is a possibility for a different outcome.*

*Our team will identify a facilitator to hold a first conversation in mid- to late-January. We ask that REMOVED EDITOR first create a support team of 2-3 people who will check in with him regularly on his progress. We would like for one person on his support team to be the designated person to communicate with the survivor's support team and/or the facilitator; we are comfortable with the designated communicator changing during the process as we understand that different individuals will have different levels of capacity to participate at different points in the process.*

*Next, we are reiterating the requests that the survivor made in her 11/14 email. We are asking REMOVED EDITOR to respond to the following four questions:*

- *What happened?*
- *What were you thinking at the time?*
- *What have you thought about since?*
- *How will we\* make sure this doesn't happen again?*

*\*We, in this context, refers to REMOVED EDITOR and his community. As we shared in our statement, we believe that violence is not an individual problem but a community problem.*

*This time, we are seeking answers to these questions about the consent and boundary violations that occurred on **both October 30th and November 15th**. Please let us know if REMOVED EDITOR and his support team have any safety or security concerns about address these questions by email, and we will be open to making appropriate accommodations.*

*Next, we ask that REMOVED EDITOR read this article, and then read and write brief (1-2 pages) reflections on each of the following texts:*

- *The Will to Change by bell hooks; and*

- *Turning the World Inside Out* by Nora Samaran.

*Once these steps are completed, we will be able to work with REMOVED EDITOR's support team to move forward with scheduling the first community accountability session in January, which will involve: setting agreements, goals, and expectations for the process.*

*We are grateful for the care that is being taken in the response.*

The next time we heard from the same editor was on December 24th, offering an opportunity to review a statement that was shared publicly on Commune's social media on December 26th. After the statement went up, we heard nothing.

Then, on January 12, we received an email from two Commune editors who were planning to participate in the accountability process as the accountability team for the person who raped me. They shared: "*Both COMMUNE EDITOR 1 and COMMUNE EDITOR 2 have known FORMER EDITOR for some time, are central members of the Commune collective, and are personally and politically invested in him treating the need to take accountability and the possibility of restorative justice incredibly seriously.*" But, instead of answering any of the questions or providing reflections on the readings, they shared that none of our requests had been completed. Instead, he now had a therapist.

We responded, exasperated, on January 15th. We reiterated our asks. We provided a folder of documentation—signal messages, text messages, emails, direct messages on twitter where he harassed me after I blocked him on other mediums. The documentation showed not only the ways that the person who raped me had already been confronted, repeatedly, but also the ways manipulation, gaslighting, and boundary violations that occurred via messages. We asked that a cis het man also be engaged on the accountability team. We said: "While we appreciate you both stepping in to help with this process, we want to flag that we are concerned by REMOVED EDITOR's

decision to put the labor of addressing his abusive behaviors entirely on women and survivors. We believe that the onus should be on cis men to address the violence of cis men. In order to move forward, we ask that REMOVED EDITOR enlist the support of at least one cis man on the accountability team and/or join a men's support group. Later, we were assured that a third person was added to the accountability team, and we asked that this person have access to the folder that we shared. The folder was not shared with this third person.

We recommended readings, and expressed concerns about engaging a therapist at this stage. We said: "As you'll read in Chapter 14 of the Bancroft book, 'Therapy typically will not address any of the central causes of abusiveness, including entitlement, coercive control, disrespect, superiority, selfishness, or victim blaming.' Therapy often allows an abuser to focus on *his feelings* and *other people's behavior* when we need REMOVED EDITOR to focus on *other people's feelings* and *his own behavior*. Therapy may be effective after initial steps have been taken in the accountability process, but we are concerned that, at this stage, it may be a barrier to accountability." We provided scanned versions of annotated chapters of "*Why Does He Do That?*" by Lundy Bancroft.

On January 31st, we shared that we had found a facilitator, but I was firm that we would not enter into a facilitated community accountability process until we knew that he was committed to repair. We set a deadline of February 14th to receive answers to the questions and reflections on the readings.

On February 13th, we received a statement in which the person who raped me wrote at length about his problems with colleagues at Commune, and insinuated that I was saying that he raped me because he forgot my birthday. I was horrified. *Did they even open the folder? How could they send this to me?* If the accountability team did open the folder, and did not care about the clear inconsistencies, this would be much worse. The impact, however, would be the same.

It became clear that the opportunity to engage in an accountabil-

ity process was being used to continue his abuse, and this time, two Commune editors were helping. We called out the abuse. We set a new deadline of February 19th for the person who raped me and his accountability team to update the responses incorporating the documentation.

On February 17th, the third and only non-Commune accountability team member requested access to the folder, and on February 19th, we learned that one Commune editor had recused themselves. Commune's then-editor in chief was still involved. The responses in the second round improved, but I noticed that in each set of responses, the person who raped me would mention abuses or assaults on me that I had never brought up in the process. It felt like he was playing a game, to abuse me further and create a puzzle of all of the behaviors that he had gotten away with, both in my experience with him and long before then. He also continued to claim that he was unaware that I was not consenting. He went as far as to claim that he was using *dirty talk* when he said: "*Shut up, I don't care what you want.*" We were confused that the accountability team would read these responses and send them to us.

On February 21st, I said that I would review only one final version of the responses. I also added new requests—graduated consequences for the ongoing abuse that I had endured. At this point, my support team shared that I was seeking a public apology from the person who raped me and restitution. I caution others about the risks of seeking restitution, as abusers and their enablers can use these sensible requests as grounds for a lawsuit, weaponizing the legal system against survivors. Here are the words that my support team used: "*The survivor also now seeks restitution in an amount that is personally meaningful to FORMER EDITOR.*"

In retrospect, raising the bar was not only important for setting graduated consequences, but it also created a new bare minimum. In my experiences with abusers, they will always do the bare minimum to keep you around and continue their abuse, and over the course of

the abuse, the bare minimum gets lowered and lowered until it falls through the floor. Having a support team gave me more power to navigate this dynamic. The final set of responses that we received on February 29th was suddenly much more accountable and comprehensive than anything we had read before. He had read the books and provided reflections. And, there were still mentions of incidents that I had never raised, including another assault that I haven't discussed with my support team even to this day.

Abuse occurs in cycles, and we had reached the reconciliation stage within the process of seeking accountability. The ongoing abuse was further minimized in an addendum written by the accountability team reiterating that he was not aware of his behavior and patronizing me for believing otherwise. The opportunity for a community accountability process had turned into an opportunity for continued abuse. *I needed to get out, again.*

My support team offered feedback while I weighed the decision of ending these discussions against my endless hope in the capacity of humans to be accountable and transform. I know that accountability has to come from within, though often sparked by external circumstances. Boundaries can be helpful for sparking behavior change by letting people know that their harmful behavior will not be tolerated. I could not change him; he would have to do that work himself, with the support of his community. *But does his community have that capacity?*

I wrote to the accountability team on March 7th: "there is nothing further that the person who raped me can contribute to my healing. this person was never a part of my community; there is nothing to restore. he has always been a part and a product of *your* community."

Two days later, the accountability team responded: "We would like to thank you for your patience and kindness, and sincerely apologize for the ways we as a group have failed you. We will work to do better. Should there be any further requests or should you need anything from us in the future, please do not hesitate to contact us."



Two days after that, I sent a direct email from my personal email address to one of the accountability team members who continued to be in a leadership role at Commune Magazine, requesting a phone call. On the call, I disclosed the information that I had received about sexual predatory behavior from another Commune Magazine editor in leadership. I shared my advice: *Release a statement. Let people know that the accountability process is over. Take accountability for the mistakes that were made. Create a process for responding to the experiences of other survivors—a portal or email address where people can share their concerns anonymously, a timeline for responding, a person or a group of people to respond to those complaints and ideally this would be someone who hasn't been accused of sexual harassment or assault.* I was told that the idea would be brought to Commune's leadership, and to the other Commune editor who had been involved in the process. Then, to add a layer of assurance that this advice would be taken, I made this a formal request to close the accountability process with greater closure.

A happy ending, designed and packaged for them to use, for us all to point to as success.

**There will always be mistakes in community accountability processes. Like Aishah Shahidah Simmons has said, we are building the plane as we fly it. The question is not whether mistakes will be made, but how we respond when they are: own and repair, or dismiss and deny? Only one path forward leads to transformation.**

I offered the same guiding questions to the accountability team to encourage the group to take accountability for the mistakes that were made, and I asked: "what will you do to prevent and address gendered violence in your communities in the future?"

For Commune's leadership, I had already offered the answer to the

question I was asking.

In response, I received an anonymous email from a proton mail account letting me know that the accountability team was going to disengage. I followed up with Commune on Twitter and received a bizarre graphic letting me know about the internal changes that happened at Commune, and asserting that Commune was never involved in the process, that Commune collective members participated in their capacity as individual community members and not on behalf of Commune. The person who raped me was just a bad apple, who has been removed, they seemed to say. Although they say they were confused about my request, I know that, when I am confused, I ask for clarification instead of shutting down pathways for dialogue.

I released my open letter on March 28th, focusing on my journey of seeking safety, healing, justice, and accountability. The collage art is clipped directly from the pages of Commune. I am hopeful, and principled, and also a troll.

Commune editors did not acknowledge my letter, but both chief editors reached out to me, gaslighting me and telling me that I had somehow made them unsafe by not revealing my rapist's name publicly—a choice that I made to avoid replicating carceral systems, but never a request that I made of others. Commune independently chose to conceal my rapist's name, even going as far as to remove their masthead and delay the announcement of the new editors.

I waited to see actions steps from Commune over the course of April. Surely, they were concerned about a second potential sexual predator. Perhaps they would create the kind of process that I had described. Perhaps the ways that I had been abused, assaulted, and then retraumatized would create some urgency. Throughout April, they did not create a process for responding to survivors, but they did create a SoundCloud to read their articles.

In recent weeks, a Commune collective member who had not been involved in the process reached out to me and shared personal experiences that resonated with me, that I will not share here. I

learned that the person who had abused and assaulted me had been involved in multiple accountability processes in the past, and that the Commune members who had been involved in the accountability process had known and neglected to disclose this information to me and my support team. For me, this adds layers of horror to the ongoing abuse that I experienced through March of this year, actively enabled by Commune collective members.

This collective member, who I communicated with only through her Commune email address and by phone, was set on getting justice for me, she said. We spent hours on the phone discussing my concerns. On May 4th, I was forwarded something that I was told was an apology from a Commune editor who had been involved in the process. But, it wasn't an apology; it was a long list of excuses. Retraumatized, again, I requested that myself and my process not be mentioned in any public statement. But, the next day, they released a statement both gaslighting me and retraumatizing me, again. It included information about a portal to share and access accountability for experiences, but it doesn't share what happens when that information is received; there is no transparency about who serves on the accountability council; and worse, the information is included only as a statement that has been shared to Twitter as a blurry graphic with small font. There is no information about this portal on Commune's website.

And I feel like I've ended up in an ongoing abusive relationship with a leftist magazine where I have experienced cycles of violation and reconciliation similar to what I experienced with their former editor in chief—who seems to have created in this structure the perfect context to protect, enable, and cover up abuse, hidden behind revolutionary language.

**“If it is bad ethics, it isn't good politics. Revolutionary politics is ethical or it isn't revolutionary.”—  
James and Grace Lee Boggs**

It has taken time for me to be able to both process my experiences with ongoing abuse, and write this statement to provide clarity to those who have been paralyzed by the bystander effect, and offer more resources and information to others who might be navigating these kinds of dynamics in their processes of seeking community accountability. I am incredibly grateful for the ways that my community has continued to support me. I wish this level of support for everyone.

In addition to my experiences, Commune Magazine has been criticized for its anti-Blackness, in both its thought and the behavior of its editorial collective members. Its collective members have previously been called out for rape apologism, for terrorizing women of color, and for gendered violence. I add my story to the stories that came before, and in the hopes of breaking the cycle.

I believe that the right thing to do next is for Commune to close, and redistribute its funding to Black-led organizations working to address gendered violence, such as Collective Action for Safe Spaces, the Marsha P. Johnson Institute, Project NIA, and Survived and Punished. I don't believe that we can count on Commune to do the right thing alone. Some people are committed to dismissing survivors, protecting sexual predators, and upholding white supremacist cis heteropatriarchal oppression. We have to work around them to create a context that promotes accountability, and demonstrates that oppressive behaviors will not be tolerated.

**To the surrounding community: will you be in solidarity with me? Together, we can create a context that demonstrates that violence will not be tolerated, and whole communities can take collective responsibility for keeping each other safe.**

The revolution starts with all of us.



extremely dangerous  
times can be  
losing these



# CONCLUSION

On May 13th, Commune Magazine announced its closure on Twitter in response to a chorus of Commune subscribers and contributors speaking out in solidarity with me and my support network against the abuses that were perpetuated and enabled by the Commune collective.

What followed was a months-long harassment campaign against me by several anonymous (and some not anonymous) Twitter accounts that doxxed me, mocked my experience of sexual violence and my response to it, and at one point impersonated me. Another survivor shared with me that they, too, had been doxxed after being abused by a Commune editor and that the information shared had been used to fuel a harassment campaign against them for an extended period of time. Another survivor shared that, when they raised concerns about the abuse and retaliation, their concerns were dismissed as “scene” drama. All of this mirrored my experience.

Retaliation is used to punish survivors for speaking out and to intimidate more survivors out of coming forward. It is a tactic to uphold the status quo. At many points in the aftermath of the abuse, I felt like I was falling apart: I was angry and exasperated. The accountability process was an extension of the abuse, but the aftermath of being doxxed, harassed, and badjacketed -- in the middle of an isolating global pandemic while I was experiencing housing instability in a place less than a mile from my rapist -- was much more debilitating for me than the abuse itself.

It felt never-ending.

In June, shortly after Commune Magazine had announced its closure, two abusers were outed in a mutual aid project I was involved in, and I joined the support team of two of the survivors. I also joined the support team of another survivor who spoke out this summer about being abused in an accountability process with her abuser—another organizer building a platform talking about accountability and revolution while abusing and assaulting Black women.

I started to notice and reflect on the abuse that I had experienced in previous relationships, abusive behaviors that I had brushed off. How many times did the Commune Magazine editor assault me before I spoke out? How many times have I remained silent about abuse?

I felt like I was suffocating in the realization that abuse was everywhere. It is in the air we breathe. Much like fascism, it creeps up on us with everyday oppressive behaviors that keep getting worse and over time become normalized. I came back to my own words: If we don't constantly, and consciously, struggle against the messages of the dominant culture, we are bound to internalize oppression. What can we learn about making a revolution from the practice of rejecting oppressive behaviors in our everyday lives? How do we wake up every day, breathe in air polluted by rape culture and interlocking systems of oppression, and exhale in a way that heals?

From years of facilitating trainings on de-escalation and bystander intervention, I know a few things about community-based strategies for building safety from interpersonal violence without the state. I know that bystander intervention involves taking action to show that oppressive behaviors won't be tolerated and that whole communities are responsible for keeping each other safe. I know that everyone has heard horror stories of bystander intervention gone wrong, and the stories of successful interventions are rarely told. I have considered this fact in my critiques of community accountability processes: What if there are many stories of processes gone well that are never told because, in the end, everything was fine? I also know that, when we

tell our stories of bystander intervention, the strategy is not threatened, but rather, it is strengthened: the stories reveal our growth edges and help us improve. More than that, I know that there's a difference between intervening to address everyday oppressive behaviors and intervening to interrupt a pattern of abuse and manipulation. I know that there's a difference between being accountable and learning all the right words to say to perform accountability. I know very well from experience that survivors are manipulated into giving second, third, and seventeenth chances because we want to believe that our abusers will change: Most of us have left our abusers many times, and we've been reeled back in by heartfelt apologies, performances of accountability, and promises of changed behavior that never last. How often are these abusive patterns being replicated in community accountability processes? And, how will we know unless we talk about it? Abuse thrives in silence. When we break our silence, survivors are able to find each other, help each other heal, and shed light on the truth.

**“Constructive criticism and self-criticism are extremely important for any revolutionary organization. Without them, people tend to drown in their mistakes, not learn from them.”—Assata Shakur**

No space is immune from abuse. And perhaps, given a certain set of conditions and power over others, any one of us can be abusive. If we want safer organizing spaces, how do we get there?

Many of our radical collectives and formations don't have processes for dealing with abuse. Often, we simply aren't prepared to respond to these situations when they inevitably come up. We jump into new formations, mobilizing quickly to do work that feels urgent and necessary, without having conversations about how we will collectively work to maintain community safety in our organizing spaces. The urgency mindset is rooted in ableism, capitalism, and



white supremacy.

## **Caring for each other is also urgent, necessary work.**

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, shortly after I released my open letter to the person who raped me, I was part of a mutual aid project redistributing money, food, and supplies directly to Black New Yorkers, especially Black trans folks, Black sex workers, and Black migrant workers who are overwhelmingly excluded from state relief.

While each of the three groups involved in the project had varying levels of processes in place for dealing with harm, we had never taken the time to develop processes in our shared coalition space. We hadn't talked about our individual needs and boundaries around working with someone who had recently raped and abused multiple people. Some people in the project were aware that there were two abusers in the group, others of us were not aware. But many of us experienced further harm and manipulative behavior by one of the abusers who was later outed, highlighting the ways that abusers tend to engage in a *pattern* of abusive, oppressive behaviors, and that it's just as important to interrupt and address the everyday behaviors as it is to respond when the abuse becomes severe. People involved in the project had different understandings of what boundaries we needed to have in place. Without coming to shared agreements through open communication about what each of us needed to be safe, we were operating under the false assumption that we all had the same needs and boundaries. By making assumptions about each others' needs and boundaries, we created an environment where abuse could thrive. We needed both an intervention at the individual level and the structural level.

## **Creating shared agreements around our safety**

**needs and boundaries, as well as processes and practices for being accountable to those shared agreements, is a necessary starting point for building safer organizing spaces.**

But what does it matter if we have processes in place when some people are considered too important to be accountable?

The reality is that, there are groups that have developed processes for addressing harm and abuse, and yet, when abuse happens, it is often survivors who are treated like we *have* caused harm by communicating our experiences, needs, and boundaries. It is survivors, especially those who are Black, trans, queer, and/or disabled, who are seen as expendable. Abusers, and their enablers, use their power to push out, shut out, and badjacket those that they have abused by manufacturing accusations to either get ahead of or discredit survivors who might speak out.

Processes for addressing harm are then used against those who raise concerns or ask for accommodations: survivors, disabled folks, trans folks, young folks, and caregivers are seen as more expendable, often because they are newer to the space, hold fewer relationships that are seen as valuable to the group, or have needs that the group doesn't want to accommodate.

**Addressing interpersonal behavior isn't enough, because oppressive behavior in our interpersonal lives does not happen in a vacuum.**

Organizing shifts power, creates consequences for oppressive behavior, and raises the voices of those who are being oppressed. It enables us to dismantle systems that prop up abusers in order to create space for explicitly anti-oppressive ways of being in relationship with each other.

And yet, any strategy can be manipulated. Our radical spaces are

being challenged right now to build in our microcosm the world that we want to create, where there is space for all of us to breathe. Let's rise to the challenge.



